

# ABSORB FLAVOURS AND INFO AT ANNUAL WINE FESTIVAL

The Juliet Cullinan Standard Bank Wine Festival, now in its 28<sup>th</sup> year, is coming up in June. Susan Reynard asks founder Juliet how the festival and food and wine pairing have changed during the past three decades.

Juliet Cullinan's eponymous wine festival is now in its 28<sup>th</sup> year, under the sponsorship of Standard Bank for the past 18 years. A lot has changed in the world of wine since the first festival, and much has stayed the same – quality, a sense of story and passion for South Africa's world-class wine industry.

Juliet continues to handpick wineries that represent the Cape's finest vintages. The winemakers are the biggest draw cards; they are on hand to discuss the nuances of their wines and share knowledge of terroir and tastes with oenophiles, sommeliers, cellar masters and amateur enthusiasts. Around 50 winemakers from boutique and award-winning brands are showcased each year, ensuring an intimate and upmarket event.

Based abroad, Juliet travels to South Africa regularly to visit the winelands and chat to winemakers, sommeliers and creative cellar masters. We caught up with her at The Peech Boutique Hotel in Johannesburg. She shares her thoughts on the evolving wine industry:

**"I started the wine festival** to provide a platform for the winemakers in the Cape to showcase their excellent wines in Johannesburg. At that time, winemakers seldom left their farms



JULIET CULLINAN AT THE PEECH HOTEL

and when we asked them to wear a suit, they wore the one from their Matric dance! I gave them the opportunity to meet a great market in Johannesburg that was always a bit more knowledgeable than other areas. At that time, people I knew bought imported wine as they were inexpensive and quality South African wineries were just beginning to prove themselves.

**"When I taste wines internationally,** I like the subtlety of French wines but there is something about the richness and complexity

of South African wines that makes them so appealing. They pair better with food and you don't have to search for the intensity of fruit. In international blind tastings, South African wines often win awards as they have a depth of flavour yet are refined and elegant.

**"Wine and people must always be seen together.** Our biggest wine markets can influence how and why we create certain wines, as can major influencers in industry.

- The Napa Valley winemaker **Robert Mondavi**, known as the 'father of American wine', aimed at creating a Californian world-class wine to rival those from Europe. He built the first new winery after prohibition, begun perfecting techniques in the vineyards and cellar, and specialising in food and wine pairing.
- **Robert Parker** was the most influential American wine critic. His love of big, full oaked wines encouraged Bordeaux producers to change their wine-making techniques to the fuller upfront flavours and the world followed suit. His 100-point rating dictated tastes and escalated international prices.
- The British wine critic, journalist and wine writer **Jancis Robinson** conveys love, admiration and